

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

OCT 28 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

(Signed) HK

SUBJECT: U.S. Vietnam Policy

Attached are several items which you might find helpful in preparing your November 3rd speech.

At Tab A are excerpts from statements by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson and Senator Robert Kennedy explaining U.S. commitment to South Vietnam and Laos. Although these remarks are not the result of a complete survey of all public statements, they are probably representative of the views of these men.

At Tab B are some recent foreign press comments about our Vietnam policy. Most of the newspapers quoted warn that rapid withdrawal would cause a loss of confidence in U.S. willingness and ability to defend its allies.

PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

AID TO THE STATE OF VIET-NAM: Message from the President of the United States to the President of the Council of Ministers of Viet-Nam, October 23, 1954 (excerpt)

"... We have been exploring ways and means to permit our aid to Viet-Nam to be more effective and to make a greater contribution to the welfare and stability of the Government of Viet-Nam. I am, accordingly, instructing the American Ambassador to Viet-Nam to examine with you in your capacity as Chief of Government, how an intelligent program of American aid given directly to your Government can serve to assist Viet-Nam in its present hour of trial, provided that your Government is prepared to give assurances as to the standards of performance it would be able to maintain in the event such aid were supplied.

"The purpose of this offer is to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Viet-Nam in undertaking needed reforms. It hopes that such aid, combined with your own continuing efforts, will contribute effectively toward an independent Viet-Nam endowed with a strong government. Such a government would, I hope, be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance, that it will be respected both at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people."

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VIETNAMESE-UNITED STATES RELATIONS: Joint Statement Issued at Washington by the President of the United States and the President of Viet-Nam, May 11, 1957 (excerpt)

"Noting that the Republic of Vietnam is covered by Article IV of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, President Eisenhower and President Ngo Dinh Diem agreed that aggression or subversion threatening the political independence of the Republic of Vietnam would be considered as endangering peace and stability. The just settlement of problems of the area by peaceful and legitimate means within the framework of the United Nations Charter will continue to be the mutual concern of both Governments..."

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President Dwight D. Eisenhower (Cont'd)

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THE IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF THE SECURITY AND  
PROGRESS OF VIET-NAM: Address by the President (Eisenhower),  
Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, April 4, 1959 (excerpt)

"...Strategically south Viet-Nam's capture by the Communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries in Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement. The freedom of 12 million people would be lost immediately and that of 150 million others in adjacent lands would be seriously endangered. The loss of south Viet-Nam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom.

"Viet-Nam must have a reasonable degree of safety now -- both for her people and for her property. Because of these facts, military as well as economic help is currently needed in Viet-Nam.

"We reach the inescapable conclusion that our own national interests demand some help from us in sustaining in Viet-Nam the morale, the economic progress, and the military strength necessary to its continued existence in freedom."

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PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

Statement by President Kennedy, March 23, 1961 (excerpt)

"...My fellow Americans, Laos is far away from America, but the world is small. Its 2 million peaceful people live in a country three times the size of Austria. The security of all of southeast Asia will be endangered if Laos loses its neutral independence. Its own safety runs with the safety of us all -- in real neutrality observed by all.

"I want to make it clear to the American people, and to all the world, that all we want in Laos is peace, not war -- a truly neutral government, not a cold-war pawn -- a settlement concluded at the conference table, not on the battlefield. Our response will be in close cooperation with our allies and the wishes of the Laotian Government. We will not be provoked, trapped, or drawn into this or any other situation. But I know that every American will want his country to honor its obligations to the point that freedom and security of the free world and ourselves may be achieved..."

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Letter from President Kennedy to President Ngo Dinh Diem, October 24, 1961 (excerpt)

"...I have taken note of the stream of threats and vituperation, directed at your government and mine, that flows day and night from Hanoi. Let me assure you again that the United States is determined to help Viet-Nam preserve its independence, protect its people against Communist assassins, and build a better life through economic growth..."

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Internal Conflict in Vietnam: Statements by President Kennedy.

(a) News Conference Statement, July 17, 1963 (excerpt)

"...we want to see a stable government there carrying on a struggle to maintain its national independence. We believe strongly in that. We're not going to withdraw from that effort. In my opinion, for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse, not only of South Vietnam, but Southeast Asia, so we're going to stay there."

President John F. Kennedy (cont'd)

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(b) Interview with Walter Cronkite of Columbia Broadcasting System, September 2, 1963 (excerpt)

"...All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear. But I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake. That would be a great mistake. I know people don't like Americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort. Forty-seven Americans have been killed in combat with the enemy, but this is a very important struggle even though it is far away.

"We took all this -- made this effort to defend Europe. Now Europe is quite secure. We also have to participate -- we may not like it -- in the defense of Asia."

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(c) Interview with David Brinkley and Chet Huntley of National Broadcasting Company, September 9, 1963 (excerpt)

"Mr. Brinkley: Mr. President, have you had any reason to doubt this so-called 'domino theory,' that if South Viet-Nam falls, the rest of Southeast Asia will go behind it?

"The President: No, I believe it. I believe it. I think that the struggle is close enough. China is so large, looms so high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Viet-Nam went, it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists. So I believe it.

"...We can't make the world over, but we can influence the world. The fact of the matter is that with the assistance of the United States and SEATO, Southeast Asia and indeed all of Asia has been maintained independent against a powerful force, the Chinese Communists. What I am concerned about is that Americans will get impatient and say, because they don't like events in Southeast Asia or they don't like the Government in Saigon, that we should withdraw. That only makes it easy for the Communists. I think we should stay. We should use our influence in as effective a way as we can, but we should not withdraw."

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Speech at Johns Hopkins, April 7, 1965 (excerpt)

"... We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny, and only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure...

"... The first reality is that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam. Its object is total conquest...

"... Why are we in South Viet-Nam?

"We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Viet-Nam defend its independence.

"And I intend to keep that promise.

"To dishonor that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemies, and to the terror that must follow, would be an unforgivable wrong.

"We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe from Berlin to Thailand are people whose well being rests in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Viet-Nam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war.

"We are also there because there are great stakes in the balance. Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Viet-Nam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another. The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must say in Southeast Asia -- as we did in Europe -- in the words of the Bible: 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.'

"There are those who say that all our effort there will be futile -- that China's power is such that it is bound to dominate all Southeast Asia. But there is no end to that argument until all of the nations of Asia are swallowed up.

President Lyndon B. Johnson (cont'd)

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"There are those who wonder why we have a responsibility there. Well, we have it there for the same reason that we have a responsibility for the defense of Europe. World War II was fought in both Europe and Asia and when it ended we found ourselves with continued responsibility for the defense of freedom.

"Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves -- only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way..."

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Feb. 18, 1962: News Conference, Saigon (excerpts):

"We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win."

"I think the American people understand and fully support this struggle. Americans have great affection for the people of Vietnam. I think the United States will do what is necessary to help a country that is trying to repel aggression with its own blood, tears and sweat."

" . . . Vietnam's struggle to preserve its independence against Communist aggression is a grave one which affects free countries everywhere. . . . "

Feb. 23, 1965: Statement at Ithaca, N. Y., New York Times (excerpts):

"I'm in favor of keeping that commitment," he said, "and taking whatever steps are necessary. I'm not in favor of staying a minute more than necessary."

" . . . If our word means anything, we must remain as long as it is evident that the people favor it . . . . "

He expressed belief that the main part of the population wanted the United States to stay.

Feb. 19, 1966: Statement (excerpt):

"There are three routes before us: military victory, a peaceful settlement, or withdrawal.

" . . . For the United States to withdraw now, as I said last May, would be a repudiation of commitments undertaken and confirmed by three administrations. It would flatly betray those in Viet-Nam whom we have encouraged by our support to resist the forces of Hanoi and the Viet-Cong. Unilateral withdrawal would injure, perhaps irreparably, the principle of collective security, and undermine the independence of small nations everywhere in the world. And it would offer no hope for a reasonable accomodation with China in the future. There are reasonable and responsible steps which we can take to raise the possibility of improved relations with China in the future. But unilateral withdrawal would only reward aggression and could offer China no inducement to reach accommodation in a peaceful world.



DIGEST OF FOREIGN PRESS COMMENT

ON U.S. VIETNAM POLICY

London Sunday Times: "Unconditional surrender -- including abandonment of the Saigon government to its own fate -- would bring the boys back home within a matter of months, but where would this leave S. Vietnam, or Laos, or Thailand or Malaya? What would it do to the stresses and strains within the U.S. itself?... Why should RN hand everything on a plate to Hanoi when the N. Vietnamese leaders have shown themselves to be monsters of intransigence? If the marchers in the American streets were as critical of Hanoi as they are of Washington, it would be more equitable and helpful.

"The best thing that Mr. Nixon can do now... is to make perfectly and understandably plain... his resolve to bring the war to an end within a specified space of time."

London Sunday Observer: "Having condemned the US involvement as tragic folly, there remains the fiercely difficult question of how to get out in such a way as to minimize human suffering and limit the damage to world stability... It would be naive not to recognize that any US withdrawal is bound to strengthen the Gaullist type of argument that you can never fully trust America (or anyone else) and that you had therefore best rely on yourself alone. And the consequences of such a nuclear do-it-yourself mood spreading throughout the world are incalculable... To point out all these difficulties and dangers is not to argue against an American withdrawal. But it is to argue against a quick one."

London Sunday Telegraph: "The President must always be ready to pull out one more soldier than even his boldest advisers will recommend; always one less than Hanoi will hope. It is a ghastly tightrope to walk. But before we shake it too hard we might remember that we are all on it with him."

Figaro:

"It is self-evident that an unconditional disengagement, an immediate return home of the American troops, would mean defeat for the U.S.... If the U.S. leaves Vietnam to the NLF, the power of the U.S. will not be significantly diminished. What will be shattered... is U.S. determination to keep its commitments in all S.E. Asia and the seas around it, and the confidence of its allies in its willingness and ability to defend them. "

Bonner Rundschau of W. Germany: "The increasingly violent U.S. home-front reaction against the war creates the impression that America is no longer absolutely reliable. Fear is being voiced that the American people, alarmed by inflation, racial troubles, and the threat of unemployment, are wearying of their nation's role as the leading power in the West. This situation is awkward for us Europeans who, having lived under U.S. protection for 24 years, have felt secure and prosperous. "

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